

October 23, 2001

Dear Citizen:

The tragic events of September 11 have caused the nation to become panicked by reports of anthrax contamination and other threats to our safety and health. When we allow panic to control our actions, we are effectively allowing terrorists to create chaos within our communities. The best countermeasure for controlling and eliminating this panic is accurate information.

While employees and citizens are encouraged to report suspicious activities, you are also encouraged to use common sense, seek good information from reliable sources, and take some responsibility for your own personal safety. One of the most important pieces of information we can provide you with is that as of today, October 19, 2001, **THERE HAVE BEEN NO CONFIRMED CASES** of Anthrax or other hazardous substance contamination in the City of Lynchburg or the Commonwealth of Virginia.

For suspicious letters, packages or other items received in the City of Lynchburg take the following precautions:

- **Remain calm**
- **Leave the item where it is found (do not shake item, move it from place to place, take to show others, etc.)**
- **Contact a supervisor to report the item. The supervisor will decide if authorities need to be notified**
- **Call 9-1-1 (if appropriate)**
- **Make a list of all persons involved, including people who have been in the area or perhaps had contact with the item, so that law enforcement officials can investigate with as much information as possible.**

Use common sense in dealing with any matter and, if necessary, contact 9-1-1. A police officer may be dispatched to the scene. Based on the officer's findings, other emergency personnel may be dispatched to assist with patient care, taking of samples, clean up or other related activities.

Additionally, to provide you with accurate information, we have gathered information from the Center for Disease Control, the United States Postal Service and the Virginia Department of Health. This information has been compiled into a FAQ sheet. We encourage you to share these facts with your families, friends and colleagues. In remaining calm throughout this period, we defeat the terrorists and their efforts to impact our lives. Remember - be alert, use common sense, and make sure you get **accurate information.**

Frequently Asked Questions About Anthrax

Prepared from source files at the Center for Disease Control, the United States Postal Service and the Virginia Department of Health. Special thanks to the Roanoke Office of Community Relations.

What Is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax most commonly occurs in wild and domestic animals (cattle, sheep, goats, camels, antelopes, and other herbivores), but it can also occur in humans when they are exposed to infected animals.

How Do You Get Anthrax?

Anthrax organisms can cause infection in the skin, digestive system, or the lungs. To do so, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics. Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax is extremely unlikely to occur.

How Easy Is It For Anthrax To Be Used In A Terrorist Attack?

For anthrax to affect a large group of people, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. **This is difficult to do, and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment.** If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infection can occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

How Is Anthrax Transmitted?

Anthrax infection can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalation, and gastrointestinal. Anthrax spores can live in the soil for many years, and humans can become infected with anthrax by handling products contaminated with anthrax spores or by inhaling anthrax spores from contaminated products.

What Are The Symptoms Of Anthrax?

Symptoms of disease vary depending on how the disease was contracted, but symptoms usually occur within seven (7) days.

Cutaneous: Most (about 95%) anthrax infections occur when the bacterium enters a cut or abrasion on the skin. Skin infection begins as a raised itchy bump that resembles an insect bite but within 1-2 days develops into a vesicle and then a painless ulcer, usually 1-3 cm in diameter,

with a characteristic black necrotic (dying) area in the center. Lymph glands in the adjacent area may swell. Deaths are rare with appropriate antibiotic therapy.

Inhalation: Initial symptoms may resemble a common cold. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock.

Intestinal: The intestinal disease form of anthrax may follow the consumption of contaminated meat and is characterized by an acute inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial signs of nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever are followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

How Is Anthrax Diagnosed?

Anthrax is diagnosed by isolating the bacteria from the blood, skin lesions, or respiratory secretions or by measuring specific antibodies in the blood of persons with suspected cases.

Is There A Treatment For Anthrax?

Doctors can prescribe effective antibiotics. To be effective, treatment should be initiated early. If left untreated, the disease can be fatal.

Early antibiotic treatment of anthrax is essential – Patients with anthrax generally respond well to treatment from penicillin, doxycycline and fluoroquinolones.

Is There A Way To Prevent Infection?

An anthrax vaccine has been licensed for use in humans. The vaccine is reported to be 93% effective in protecting against anthrax.

Who Should Get Vaccinated Against Anthrax?

The Center for Disease Control has recommend anthrax vaccination for the following groups:

- Persons who work directly with the organism in the laboratory
- Persons who work with imported animal hides or furs in areas where standards are insufficient to prevent exposure to anthrax spores.
- Persons who handle potentially infected animal products in high-incidence areas. (Incidence is low in the United States, but veterinarians who travel to work in other countries where incidence is higher should consider being vaccinated.)
- Military personnel deployed to areas with high risk for exposure to the organism (as when it is used as a biological warfare weapon).

What Do I Need To Look For When I Open My Mail?

The United States Post Office delivers approximately 208 billion pieces of mail each year. **The odds of an ordinary citizen being infected are extremely low. In fact, you have a much better chance of winning the lottery than being infected by anthrax through the mail.**

How Should I Open Mail And What Do I Need To Look For?

The United States Postal Service has issued instructions on how to deal with a potential Anthrax threat by mail, which we have included with this information.

What Types Of Suspicious Packages And Letters Do I Need To Be Cautious Of?

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and letters include the following...

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discolorations or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as “Personal” or “Confidential”
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address

What Should I Do If I Receive An Anthrax Threat By Mail?

- Do not handle the mail piece or package suspected of contamination.
- Notify your supervisor, who will contact the appropriate officials.
- Make sure that damaged or suspicious packages are isolated and the immediate area cordoned off.
- Ensure that all persons who have touched the mail piece wash their hands with soap and water.
- Designated officials will notify law enforcement and health department officials.
- List all persons who have touched the letter and/or envelope. Include contact information.

- Place all items worn when in contact with the suspected mail piece in plastic bags and keep them wherever you change your clothes and have them available for law enforcement officials.
- As soon as practical, shower with soap and water.
- If prescribed medication by medical personnel, take it until otherwise instructed or it runs out.
- Notify the Center for Disease Control Emergency Response at 770-488-7100 for answers to any questions.

Where can I find more information on Anthrax and BioTerrorism?

You can find extensive information at the Center for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/>, the United States Post Office at http://www.usps.com/news/2001/press/pr01_1010tips.htm or at Virginia's Department of Health website at <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/>